

Theatre Suburbia

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KRIS THOMPSON
Publicity Director

Core Business

Northwest Houston's longest running all-volunteer playhouse, a 501c nonprofit organization

Services

Community theatre, acting workshops

Homebase

Houston, Texas

Business Launch

1960

Employees

All Volunteers

Technology of Choice

SmartVault, Constant Contact, Microsoft Access, QuickBooks

'Technology Savvy' Proves a Winning Role for Nonprofit Theatre Group

Nonprofit community playhouse adopts online document storage to streamline productions

There’s no doubt that the theatre is among the top professions with traditionally paper-heavy operations. Scripts, playbills, stage manager notes, costume and prop inventories, and publicity materials are just a few examples of documents required to support productions. And no one knows this better than Theatre Suburbia Publicity Director, Kris Thompson.

“There’s so much that goes into running a non-profit theatre and its productions,” Thompson explained. “For years we managed using a big, slow computer and keeping paper files, but those days are coming to a close now that we have SmartVault.”

Thompson described the old ways of doing business at Theatre Suburbia as “cumbersome.” Prior to moving to an online document storage system, Theatre Suburbia Board members had to come into the theater, print documents from an outdated computer, and then distribute paper copies for review and approval.

“We went through a lot of paper. And our manual review process took a long time,” stated Thompson.

Adding to the issue, because those who work at the theatre are all volunteers, everyone’s schedule is different. This made coordinating onsite pick up and drop off of documents a time-consuming hassle.

“It’s so much easier now that we have our documents in the cloud. For example, we keep stage manager notes updated in SmartVault, so if someone has to miss rehearsal or drop out of the show, another manager can quickly access the notes online and take over. We’ve also streamlined our process for review and approval of items, like programs. Now we have the ability to just email a link and members can quickly access docs and review when it’s convenient for them,” explained Thompson.

Online document storage also makes it easy to securely share files with people outside of the Board as well. “SmartVault gives us the ability to invite ‘Guests’ to view documents online, which is perfect for coordinating with show directors and our web master who are not Board members. We have the ability to give them access, but limit that access to specific files.”

The Show Must Go Online

For years the theatre operated on manual processes until a few volunteers decided a change was needed. To date, the staff is well into the transition, having placed many documents in the cloud, and still working on others, like a complete inventory of props and costumes.

"We love having information easily assessable online," Thompson stated. "Of course, not everyone is completely on board yet. We have a few long-standing board members that still don't completely 'trust' an online system, but they are progressively seeing the value."

Thompson and other volunteers have successfully moved numerous 'community' documents online. Today, all Board meeting minutes, stage manager notes, ticket office process documents, publicity documents, and contact information are logically organized and stored on SmartVault. In the works is a complete portfolio of all costumes and props, complete with photos.

"We are about twenty-five percent complete on indexing props and costumes," explained Thompson. "An online portfolio will replace having to dig through a room piled to the ceiling with props to find what is needed for a specific production. This will save us an immense amount of time."

That's a Wrap

Coming into its 53rd season, the non-profit Theatre Suburbia has come a long way since the days of an all-paper operation. For Thompson, head of publicity, SmartVault has been a lifesaver, rescuing staff from having to be onsite to accomplish tasks and working from a big, slow, outdated computer.

"We do a lot of publicity around each show. That means we develop many documents and take numerous photos for public service announcements, radio and newspaper spots, and to post on our website and Facebook. All materials are now available in an instant to quickly push out publicity-related information around auditions, show openings, and the announcement of new seasons," stated Thompson.

Across all areas of the theater, Thompson noted that SmartVault has streamlined operations. "The value of having everything digitally organized and available is immeasurable. We don't plan to stop until we have everything in SmartVault."

Thompson is eager to wrap the transition from paper to the cloud, realizing the value in time savings alone. She predicts the transition will be complete by the end of 2014

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Preparing for productions at Theatre Suburbia is far more efficient these days, proving that "technology savvy" is a winning role!